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Luke 24:6–7, English Standard Version.

⁶He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.”

That’s why they call it Faith.

In 1859, Charles Darwin published *Origin of the Species*, in which he laid out his theory of evolution. It caused many church leaders around the world to conclude that the creation story in Genesis must contain errors, or worse, be fully fictional. In response to the increased level of scientific scrutiny of the Bible, people began proposing scientific theories to support many of the seemingly magical things that happen in the Bible. For example, some have suggested that the Christmas star that appeared when Jesus was born was the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn; the ancients couldn’t tell the difference between a somewhat bright faraway star and a much closer planet conjunction reflecting the sun’s light and thus appearing to be a brilliant star. Others have taken a historical or archeological approach to arguing that the Bible is in fact accurate scientifically. One argument has been used to support what, for Christians, is perhaps the most phenomenal event in the Bible: the resurrection of Christ. This is from Chapter 24 of the Gospel of Luke:

⁶He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.”

And indeed, in Chapter 9 of the Gospel of Mark Jesus is quoted as saying:

“The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.”

Why do we believe this? There is plenty of biblical evidence, that is, information from within the Bible itself to back up the resurrection. Several people are identified as having spoken with the risen Christ. Paul had an amazing life-change when he met the supposedly long-dead Christ on the road to Damascus: surely, he wouldn't have spent the bulk of his life evangelizing if he didn't truly believe he had met the risen Jesus. But what about historical or archeological evidence outside of the Bible? Miraculous events such as this are hard to prove scientifically. One viable argument would be that Jesus never died, that his heart and respiration stopped, but then started; this happens in our world. But that would negate, not prove, the resurrection. So, an historical/archeological approach might be very important, if it were compelling. What do we know that is from outside the Bible?

There is something that is called the *Nazareth Inscription*. It is in Greek, etched deeply into a white marble tablet that is about 2 feet by 15 inches. It is not

known exactly when it was discovered, but its modern history begins in a collection owned by Wilhelm Frohner in 1878. He noted in his records that it was “sent from Nazareth” – exactly where Jesus lived. The Greek is biblical, not modern, and it has been very reliably dated to the first century A.D. In 2020 it was scientifically proven that the stone came from the Greek island of Kos. This makes sense: all marble in Jerusalem had to be imported from far away. Since 1925, the tablet has been in the National Library of France. Here is what it says:

EDICT OF CAESAR.

It is my decision [concerning] graves and tombs—whichever has made them for the religious observances of parents, or children, or household members—that these remain undisturbed forever. But if anyone legally charges that another person has destroyed, or has in any manner extracted those who have been buried, or has moved with wicked intent those who have been buried to other places, committing a crime against them, or has moved sepulcher-sealing stones, against such a person, I order that a judicial tribunal be created, just as [is done] concerning the gods in human religious observances, even more so will it be obligatory to treat with honor those who have been entombed. You are absolutely not to allow anyone to move [those who have been entombed]. But if [someone does], I wish that [violator] to suffer capital punishment under the title of tomb-breaker.

A number of things about this inscription suggest that it does indeed refer to the burial of Jewish people in Israel at the time of Jesus, including the vocabulary in the edict, as well as the fact that this seems to describe the precise manner in which Jews were entombed at the time. So, an argument can be made that for some reason, the Emperor of the Roman Empire concluded that there was a problem.

Someone has made a body sealed in a tomb apparently with a rolling stone in front of it seem to disappear. And it must have created quite a ruckus – otherwise, why would Caesar create an edict? It is believed that Claudius, the man who was Caesar just after the life of Jesus, wrote this edict. In fact, if you get caught doing this, according to the edict, you're going to be executed. This is a serious punishment for stealing a Jewish body, especially considering that up until this edict, such a crime was apparently only a civil matter, not a criminal one. People have suggested that this edict was a direct response to Jesus' resurrection, that Caesar was trying to convince the world that Jesus was not resurrected, that his body was stolen. The theory is that he was trying to nip this new, exploding religion in the bud before it threatened his empire.

This is an intriguing argument. I could list dozens of other scientific, historical, archeological, and literary arguments that are rooted in information from outside the Bible and have been used to prove that the Bible is true, specifically that Jesus truly lived, truly said what he is quoted as saying in the Bible, truly performed miracles, and truly rose from the dead. But trying to somehow prove the story of Jesus is a no-win situation. There will never be the kind of proof that would satisfy those who are biased against the notion of faith, who believe that believers are fools. They simply do not want to believe. I think that it's better,

for the sake of defending the Faith and for supporting our own personal faith, to refuse to get caught up in any arguments about evolution or the resurrection.

Here is a beautiful passage from a letter we are confident was written by Paul the great Evangelist. It is from the letter that we call 2 Corinthians, and it is from Chapter 5. The shortest verse in the Bible is two words, “Jesus wept”, from Chapter 11 of the Gospel of John. This one is a bit longer, eight words: *For we walk by faith, not by sight.* If you want to memorize any Bible passage, I suggest this one: *For we walk by faith, not by sight.* In this Chapter, Paul is working hard to sell Jesus. He does this by writing about his own faith. Paul says that he lives by the message of Jesus, and because of the love and the mercy of Jesus, Paul is dedicating his life to that of a wandering evangelist. Only because his ministry is from God does he not lose heart and stop. Those who reject faith are running from God, from the truth. But those who have faith are empowered by the Holy Spirit. He tells the followers of Christ in Corinth that they should have confidence. Believers live through faith in the risen Christ. Indeed, we *walk by faith, not by sight.*

Early in the longest surviving letter of Paul’s, Romans, he writes:

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

This is from the opening of his letter, where he first identifies himself as Paul, a servant of Jesus, offers God's grace to those believers in Rome, and says that he hopes one day to make his way to Rome. Remember that this is the one letter Paul wrote to a church he had not founded and had not yet visited. He then begins the true content of his letter with our quote. In these two verses, Paul summarizes a good part of the entire letter to the faithful in Rome. He is an ambassador for Christ, and when he says that he is not ashamed of the Gospel, he is saying that he is proud and confident to be spreading the word of Christ. If the world laughs at him, he does not care - and this does not weaken his faith. The word that is translated to "ashamed" is *epaischunomai*. It means to feel a sense of loss of status in the world because of something that has happened. In other words, this man was once a highly regarded member of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee, and a zealot. But he knows that the people with whom he used to hang out with would find his new mission in life despicable, laughable, and an astonishing waste of time - and something that does damage to his former community. He is so strong in his faith that this does not matter to him. If he loses his old place of honor, it is no loss at all. He writes in our passage that it was to the Jews that Christ first brought his message, and then later to the Greek, and by this he means gentiles, non-Jews. It was a great gift that he listened to the voice of Jesus when his peers did not. When

he says that the *“righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith”* he means that simply by having faith, we are found righteous in the eyes of God. *“from faith for faith”* means that there is absolutely nothing else needed, just faith. And to sum it all up - to sum up the message of Romans - a letter that is perhaps the most influential theological document ever written: *The righteous shall live by faith.*

There are two letters that are attributed to the Apostle Paul. We don't believe he personally wrote them, but that they were penned by a follower of his. Peter, along with James, the brother of Jesus, were the heads of the Church in Jerusalem, the focal point of the emerging faith that was rapidly spreading to the entire known world. Here is something from what we call 1 Peter, Chapter 1:

⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Remember that Peter, of course, personally knew Jesus. He witnessed Jesus' preaching and his miracles, and he met Jesus after his resurrection. But our pseudo-Paul is writing to people who never knew Christ. Probably the true writer of the letter never met Jesus, and so, he is also speaking to himself. This letter speaks of the brutal persecution of the followers of Jesus, which was widespread

in the first century A.D. In our passage, the author acknowledges this suffering, a result of their faith. He states that their faith is more valuable than any earthly treasure. While all that is material will one day be destroyed – and modern physics tells us that this is indeed true – their faith will live for eternity. He praises them for having faith in Jesus despite never having met him. The joy of their faith is literally inexpressible, something that cannot be described with words. And of course, the result of their faith will be an everlasting reward. The point here is that even when we suffer for our faith, when society disapproves to the point of making life difficult for us, if we can believe in someone we have not met in the flesh, if we can have true faith, we have obtained something that is immeasurably valuable.

The English word “faith” is defined in general as a complete trust or confidence in something, and more specifically, with respect to religion, faith is a strong belief in God that is not based on literal proof. We’ve looked at this passage from James before, words written by the brother of Jesus:

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

This points out that having faith alone isn’t enough to consider oneself “saved” or righteous. We must act upon our faith; we must live by that second great

commandment of Jesus, to love all people with our entire heart, soul, and mind, just like we love God. This could be viewed in a sort of negative way, a sort of “gotcha”. If you think you have it made because you have faith, then think again. But there is a positive way of looking at this. If you wonder if your faith is true, and we all have doubts eating away at us, consider this. Does your faith drive you to live by that second commandment? Does your faith make you want to support people whom you do not know? Does it give you enough empathy for others that you reach out to support strangers who happen to pass through your life? If your faith has truly changed your way of looking at other people, if it has caused you to be willing to do without for the sake of others, especially people who are in no position to do you any favors, then you do indeed have true, deep faith.

I spoke with someone recently who was certainly not doubting her faith. She was in the middle of a series of tests to determine if she had Multiple Sclerosis. She said that she was a deep believer, that her trust in God was unwavering. Yes, she was very afraid about being told that she had M.S. But she had handed all her worries over to God. She was prepared to accept whatever God had decided she was going to have to accept. But, she said, while she was certainly afraid of watching her body lose its balance and its movement, then perhaps lose her ability to even breathe, she was not afraid of the end result – being with God for eternity

a little earlier than she had planned. Then I asked her what she did for a living. She said she was a lawyer, but that if she was diagnosed with M.S., she was going to resign so that she could use whatever healthy time she had left to work full time for a non-profit that she currently only worked for a few days a month. That is the definition of faith. And remember what faith is: knowing without worldly proof. That's why they call it Faith. *Because we know.*

Please pray very briefly with me.

God, we thank you for creating us with a huge gift, and that is the ability to have faith, to believe in something that needs no proof - because we know that you were murdered, and that you rose on the third day, as you promised. Amen.